

Historical, Regional, and Academic Collections

The thirty-two historical records repositories on the “Historical, Regional, and Academic Collections” list are among the largest and most significant archives in Tennessee. These archives keep collections of regional and in some cases even national significance. They have, therefore, been grouped together on a separate directory (instead of being placed on the “Small Archives and Repositories” list) that includes a brief description of their holdings. They are notable for their size and quality of holdings, which tend to reflect some specialization along geographical, cultural, or even racial lines. Their collecting patterns frequently reflect the regionalization of Tennessee history into three distinct divisions—west, middle and east Tennessee.

The methodology of gathering data for this survey was the same as that for the “Small Repositories” list: detailed surveys were sent out that included questions regarding the budget, staffing, collections, facilities, services, and other related aspects about the organization and nature of the repositories. The surveys were in some cases followed by phone calls. Of the thirty-one repositories listed, the majority (57%) are college or university special collections. The others are public libraries (18%), museums, historic sites, or other archival organizations (10%), churches or

religious organizations (6%), businesses or corporations (6%), and historical societies (3%).

The majority of archives on this list are associated with colleges and universities. The Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University is notable for its audio-visual material (over 30,000 sound and moving image recordings) and strong holdings in Appalachian folk culture and east Tennessee history, in addition to serving as the university archive for ETSU. The Archives of Appalachia holds over four hundred collections, including the papers of families, individuals, businesses, and institutions in Appalachia. Large photographic holdings contain almost 250,000 images. Subject areas strongly represented in the collection include the arts & crafts, religion, industrialization, folklore, and music of Appalachia.

Fisk University also has a nationally significant archive, having served since its inception in 1866 as a collecting point for diverse materials related to African-American history and culture. In addition to maintaining the university archives, which includes the records of the Jubilee Singers, past presidents, faculty and staff, and other organizations, the collection includes the papers of African-American artists, scholars, and literary figures of national acclaim, such as W.E.B. DuBois, Aaron Douglas, James Weldon



Fisk University's Jubilee Hall



African-American neighborhood ensemble

Johnson, and Langston Hughes. Fisk University also maintains the Black Oral History Collection; this project was begun in 1970, and documents the civil rights movement and black experience in America. The archive houses countless other items, including rare books, Bibles, music collections, records of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and photographs relevant to African-American history.

Middle Tennessee State University has two archives of note—the Albert Gore, Sr. Center and the Center for Popular Music. The Gore Center collects the papers of past presidents and former faculty members of MTSU, as well as items related to the university's history. The archives also collect materials of regional importance, including photographs, personal papers, and records of community organizations from Rutherford County and the surrounding area. In particular, the archive collects items related to horses because of the importance of equine husbandry and racing in the region's history. Finally, the Center is a significant repository for political and legislative collections and holds the professional papers of men and women who have served from middle Tennessee in Congress or the state legislature. The John Bragg Papers, for instance, document the career of State Representative John T. Bragg during his years of public service between 1965 and 1996. Most notably, former Senator Albert Gore, Sr.'s Papers are also kept at this facility.

The Center for Popular Music has a different focus—the study and acquisition of American popular music from the pre-revolutionary era to the present. Nashville and the region surrounding it has traditionally been an area where Southern popular music and the recording industry took root and flourished. In addition to rare books (such as song books and hymnals) and music trade catalogues, the archive has a large selection of sound recordings, including 140,000 commercial sound recordings and hundreds of hours of archival recordings. The sheet music and broadside collection is also extensive and includes popular show tunes, motion picture music, American song broadsides, newspaper music, and Civil War sheet music. The Center also has photographs and manuscript collections relating to popular music history.

West Tennessee universities have their own distinctive archival holdings. The Mississippi Valley Collection at the University of Memphis Library focuses on the history and culture of the area surrounding Memphis, including the western part of Tennessee, east Arkansas, parts of Missouri, and north Mississippi. The subject areas strongly represented in the collection include the Civil War, African-American history, and Southern popular entertainment. The Special Collections department at the Paul Meek Library at the University of Tennessee at Martin is also a significant regional repository. Its collections are



Steamboat at Memphis wharf

divided into five categories: the university archives, the manuscript collection (mostly nineteenth and twentieth century records, papers, and other items from individuals or organizations from northwest Tennessee), the state and regional history collection, the genealogy collection, and the oral history collection, which includes information on significant individuals from Weakley County and the surrounding region.

Several regionally significant archives can be found at Vanderbilt University, including the Special Collections at the Heard Library, the Television News Archive, and the Medical Archives at the Eskind Biomedical Library. The Special Collections department houses an exceptional collection of Southern literature as well as materials concerning the Fugitives and Agrarians, two important groups of intellectuals who were active at Vanderbilt during the early twentieth century. Other subjects well represented in the archive include Southern history and culture, civil rights, religion, the performing arts, and women's issues. Finally, the university archives are also kept in the special collections; these records go back as early as 1873, when the university was founded. The Television News Archive at Vanderbilt has a different, even unique, collecting focus—it holds the world's most extensive archive of broadcast news from the major American television networks. Similarly, the Medical Archives at Vanderbilt also has a specialized collection—they preserve the history of the Vanderbilt University Medical Center. Items relating to its three major disciplines—medicine, nursing, and biomedical research—form the core of the collection.

The Special Collections unit of the University of the South's duPont Library also collects items of regional significance, as does the University of Tennessee at Knoxville's Special Collections of the Hoskins Library, which consists of over 50,000 volumes of rare books and 10,000 linear feet of manuscripts. UT-Special Collections holds the university archives and materials related to the history of the Tennessee Valley Authority, east Tennessee

Unionism, World War II and war crimes, as well as the papers of several U.S. Senators, Tennessee governors, and literary figures. At Sewanee, the archive holds papers relating to Southern politics and military history, the rich literary milieu of Sewanee, and the development of the Episcopal Church in the South. In addition to maintaining a large collection of "Sewaneeana," the archive holds materials written by Sewanee authors, along with thousands of rare books, many of which are notable works of southern literature. The archive has served as a federal documents depository since 1873 and is also the official university archive.

Many other important archives in Tennessee are managed by public libraries. In East Tennessee, the McClung Historical Collection at the Knoxville-Knox County Public Library collects particularly materials on East Tennessee and the southern Appalachian region. The McClung Collection represents the oldest and largest archive of historical and genealogical materials related to the distinctive eastern region of the state. The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library has a large history and genealogy department with original materials detailing the history of Chattanooga,

Hamilton County, and the surrounding area. The genealogy and local history collections are strongest in Tennessee history, but they also contain materials pertaining to the southeast region of the United States.



Tennessee Centennial Exposition memorabilia

In middle Tennessee, the most significant library-based collection is at the Special Collections/ Nashville Room at the Nashville Public Library, which collects materials related to Nashville's history as well as Tennessee history in general. In addition to over 16,000 books, the collection includes materials such as posters, programs, postcards, photographs, slides, maps, ephemera, newspapers, scrapbooks, letters, and oral histories. Part of the library's growing Civil Rights Collection is now housed in a newly renovated Civil Rights Room featuring photographs from Nashville's 1960s sit-in movement as well as videos and oral histories pertaining to the civil rights movement. The brand-new facility is located in downtown Nashville.

West Tennessee has two libraries of regional significance that hold important collections of original historical materials. The Tennessee Room at the Jackson-Madison County Library keeps manuscript collections, newspapers, and county records devoted to genealogical and local historical research in the western region of the state. The Memphis/Shelby County Public Library and Information Center contains an archive for historically significant materials relating to Shelby County and the city of Memphis. The manuscript collections previously kept at the Cossitt Library are now housed with the collections of the Memphis/Shelby County Room in a brand-new facility. Municipal government records are kept at the Shelby County Archives along with the county records.

The largest archival collection in the state belongs to the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville, which is overseen by the Secretary of State.

TSLA is the official archive for permanent state government records as well as the foremost repository of original materials related to Tennessee history and genealogy. The governors' papers, historical documents, papers of prominent Tennesseans, manuscript collections, maps, newspapers, postcards, photographs, genealogical materials, legislative recordings, oral histories, and county records on microfilm are kept at TSLA. Manuscripts belonging to the Tennessee Historical Society are also held at TSLA and include important materials on Tennessee's frontier history, the early republic, the antebellum period, and the Civil War.



Other archives are associated with museums or historic sites. The Hermitage, the former home of President Andrew Jackson in Nashville, holds a considerable collection of manuscripts, memorabilia, and prints pertaining to Jackson. The facility also maintains the Ladies

Hermitage Association archives and photographs. In Memphis, the National Civil Rights Museum holds an archival evidence collection (documentation compiled by the Shelby County District Attorney's office on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination) and local, regional, national, and Black Panther Party newspapers. Other holdings include photographs of civil and human rights events and people, and papers related to the National Civil Rights Museum Freedom Award Honorees (This archive is not currently open for research).

Several major archives in Tennessee are associated with religious denominations or churches. The Archives of the Jewish Federation of Nashville

and Middle Tennessee collects material pertaining to the Nashville Jewish community, which was first organized in 1857. Holdings include the papers of various Jewish community organizations, local synagogues, families, and businesses. The archive also maintains an oral history collection of Holocaust survivors and older adults. The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, located in Nashville, maintains an archive of national importance with a collection focused on the historical documents of the Stone-Campbell movement. The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives is another major denominational archive with regional importance. The holdings include annuals, minutes, and proceedings of Baptist associations and conventions, comprehensive files of Baptist newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, audio and video recordings, and photographs. The manuscript collection includes personal collections and official denominational records.



Norris Dam

Finally, the Tennessee Valley Authority, an organization that had tremendous impact in Tennessee and the surrounding region during the twentieth century, maintains a number of important archives. The Maps and Photo Records Department, located in Chattanooga (formerly the Maps and Surveys Department), holds significant collections of Tennessee aerial photographs from 1937 forward, in addition to the land acquisition maps from the many dam projects in the state. TVA collaborated with other state and federal agencies to produce many different kinds of maps from the 1930s onward, including soil survey and planometric quadrangle maps and maps

incorporating hydrological, economic, and demographic data.

TVA's Cultural Resources Center, located in Norris, holds most of the black-and-white photographs from the public relations files of the 1930s and 1940s, including the small but significant body of Lewis Hines' work for the agency. The TVA Research Library in Knoxville holds a variety of one-of-a-kind items from TVA's early days; this facility is heir to the old TVA Technical Library. Typescript reports and studies by TVA staffers, newspaper clipping files, and a small number of maps, photographs, and surveys represent an important

'special collection' that sheds light on the activities of TVA's many divisions during the dam construction projects.

The wealth of archival material now available in Tennessee, as evidenced by the diverse repositories in this directory, is even more remarkable when one considers that

conditions have not always been favorable for record keeping in Tennessee. Traditionally, Tennessee did not place a great importance on preserving historical manuscripts and government records, and simple neglect and social disruptions such as the Civil War caused the loss and destruction of considerable material. Until recently, in fact, few institutions made it their main concern to collect and care for these items, with the notable exceptions of the Tennessee State Library and Archives, the McClung Historical Collection, and the Memphis/Shelby County Public Library. Even these few facilities had small staffs and little room to accommodate sizeable holdings. Had it not been for the Tennessee Historical Society, much of

the frontier history of middle and east Tennessee would have been lost. Even academic institutions like Vanderbilt University did not begin actively collecting archival materials until the 1950s and 1960s, although Fisk University began accumulating records much earlier.

Finally, the pronounced regional tendency in the state's historical culture, combined with the limited space and resources of the state's archival facility before 1952, meant that there was little centralized archiving of documents and records. The archives that did exist primarily collected in and for their particular region. TSLA gathered largely Nashville-related history, the McClung performed a similar function for east Tennessee, and so on. The regionalization of Tennessee into three distinct sections has left its mark on record keeping traditions. Each section has a fairly well-defined cultural environment that corresponds with a group of archival organizations interested in preserving the history of that milieu. Fortunately, record keeping in Tennessee is now much improved and gaining greater status in many institutions. A growing number of universities, public libraries, religious groups, private organizations, historical societies, museums, and historic sites now are committed to preserving the state's rich documentary heritage.

